

Senate Bill 470  
February 19, 2009  
Presented by Joe Maurier  
Senate Fish and Game Committee

SENATE FISH AND GAME  
EXHIBIT NO. 15  
DATE 2-19-09  
BILL NO. SB 470

Mr. Chairman and committee members, for the record I am Joe Maurier, Acting Director of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP).

SB 470 would reduce the waiting period from 7 years to 3 years for successful sheep hunters in unlimited sheep hunting districts. The overall intent of the current waiting period is to disperse the allocation of these high-value harvest opportunities across the hunting public.

In Montana, there are presently five unlimited big horn sheep hunting districts where harvest is controlled by a quota of rams taken rather than limiting the number of permits issued. These unlimited sheep districts typically have very short season lengths with minimal harvest quotas of 2 to 3 legal rams (11 total). These districts provide opportunity for any hunter to pursue a big horn sheep without having to draw a limited permit, for which the odds are extremely limited (<1% = 21,733 applications for 153 either sex permits).

Although more remote and harder to hunt than limited districts, unlimited districts can be exploited by hunters who are very familiar with the areas, and who are very successful at taking a limited resource. Reducing the waiting period from 7 years to 3 would increase the potential number of hunters in the field by up to 44 hunters, which may increase competition or decrease hunt quality. In the most extreme case, this could lead to pressure on the FWP Commission to shift an unlimited district to a limited district.